



## THE ROLE OF ARMENIAN POTTERS OF KUTAHIA IN THE OTTOMAN CERAMIC INDUSTRY

*Dickran Kouymjian*

Armenian potters almost exclusively crafted the ceramics produced in the western Anatolian city of Kutahia (Kütahya), about 225 miles (360 kilometers) southeast of Constantinople/Istanbul, from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Armenians may have been active even earlier in this locality where various kinds of ceramics were manufactured from pre-historic times, as has been verified from twentieth-century excavations,<sup>2</sup> because an Armenian colony existed there from the thirteenth century and an Armenian church from at least the year 1391.<sup>3</sup>

Until the 1960s, Western and later Turkish experts and collectors gave little attention to these ceramics, dismissing them as later provincial offshoots of the more refined and elegant production of Iznik. Even when there were Armenian inscriptions

---

<sup>1</sup> After four decades, the fundamental study on Kutahia ceramics remains, John Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery from the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, Jerusalem*, vol. 1: *The Pictorial Tiles and Other Vessels*, with an edition of the Armenian texts by C.J.F. Dowsett, and vol. 2: *A Historical Survey of the Kütahya Industry and A Catalogue of the Decorative Tiles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); both reissued in one volume (Antelias: Catholicosate of Cilicia, 2005). A French variant of the present article appeared in *Des serviteurs fidèles. Les enfants de l'Arménie au service de l'État turc*, ed. Maxime Yevadian (Montélimar: Sources d'Arménie, 2010), pp. 64-85.

<sup>2</sup> Faruk Şahin, "Kütahya çini-keramik sanatı ve tarihinin yeni buluntular açısından değerlendirilmesi" [A Reappraisal of Ceramic-Tile Art and History in Kutahia in the Light of New Finds], *Sanat tarihi yyllığı*, vols. 9-10 (1979-80): 259-86. Photographs of shards can be found in Garo Kürkman, *Magic of Clay and Fire: A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters* (Istanbul: Suna and İnan Kırac Foundation, 2006), pp. 34-42.

<sup>3</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 1.

on some early pieces, lacking on Iznik ware in any language, there was a tendency to deny their origin by saying that Armenians may have commissioned them from Muslim potters, just as some eminent specialist of Islamic art claimed that oriental rugs with Armenian inscriptions were produced by Turkish-Muslim artisans for rich Armenian clients. Thanks perhaps more than anything else to the massive study of John Carswell, not only are these ceramics, manufactured within the Ottoman Empire, accepted as the work of Armenians and not Turks, but today major collectors of Kutahia ware are themselves Turks.<sup>4</sup>

Already in the second millennium B.C. high quality burnished "red ware" was manufactured in Armenia; some believe this type, known throughout the Near East, may have originated there. Later in the first millennium, Urartian wares were distinguished by their quality and diversity. Potters cleverly imitated metal vessels such as the famous shoe-shaped rhyton or drinking cup from Erebuni. Excavations at Dvin and Ani, Armenian capitals for long periods from the fifth to the eleventh centuries and inhabited even later, revealed very interesting local pottery, some of which followed fashions prevalent in the region: the yellow and green splash ware or the turquoise blue faience which also was produced in great quantity in neighboring Islamic countries.

Ceramics with figures of birds painted in light green on a white or light yellow ground copy a common Byzantine type found throughout the Near East. Some dishes, however, have painted human, animal, and hybrid motifs typically Armenian in style, and some even bear Armenian inscriptions. From the tenth to the thirteenth century, the ceramics industry in Armenia, especially at Ani, was important and of high quality.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Many of these collections are listed in Kürkman, *Magic of Clay and Fire*, p. 13. The major ones are the Suna and İnan Kıraç Collection and the Sadberk Hanim Museum, major objects from which were exhibited at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris, April-July 2000, and accompanied by a beautiful catalogue: Laure Soustiel, *Splendeurs de la céramique ottoman du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Istanbul: Vehbi Koç Foundation, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> For a brief illustrated overview of Armenian ceramics, see Dickran Kouymjian, *The Arts of Armenia* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1992), "Ceramics," pp. 46-48, slides 166-80; also on the Internet: [http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/arts\\_of\\_armenia/frescoes\\_mosaics\\_ceramics.htm](http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/arts_of_armenia/frescoes_mosaics_ceramics.htm).

*Kutahia Ceramics—Early History*

In the post-medieval period, the Armenian ceramics industry flourished at one major center: Kutahia, though there are also a large number of dishes and bowls inscribed with Armenian monographs from seventeenth-century Safavid Iran, probably Isfahan/New Julfa. Recent scholarship suggests the possibility of Armenian potters active in workshops near Isfahan.<sup>6</sup> Kutahia's Armenian population increased rapidly; a second church was built in 1490, and a third in 1512.<sup>7</sup> Modern Turkish excavations have revealed that the city had been a ceramic center from pre-Christian times with large finds of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vessels of a red clay, sometimes decorated with blue and white glaze in the style of early Iznik.<sup>8</sup> Whether Armenians were involved in their production remains unclear, but already in the fifteenth-century colophons of manuscripts speak of Armenian potters.<sup>9</sup>

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were two major ceramic centers in the Ottoman Empire, Iznik (the ancient Nicaea) and Kutahia with much evidence to suggest that they were rivals. Both used the same kind of siliceous clay with vivid polychrome under painting and a beautifully transparent glaze, no doubt trying to imitate the much-prized porcelain imported from China.<sup>10</sup> Both centers seem to have their modern genesis in the fifteenth century, probably producing a popular Chinese imitation blue and white ware. The second half of the sixteenth century was the glorious moment of exquisite Iznik tiles and pottery directly patronized by the Ottoman sultans, but in the next century there was a decline in patronage. By the end of the seventeenth century, Iznik collapsed as a major pottery center and Kutahia became the dominant producer of not just cups,

---

<sup>6</sup> Yolanda Crowe, *Persia and China. Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum 1501-1738* (Geneva: La Borie, 2002), pp. 226, 240, figs. 354-56, 423.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond H. Kévorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman à la veille du génocide* (Paris: ARHIS, 1992), p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Laure Soustiel, "Kütahya-Jérusalem: Pérégrinations de trois carreaux arméniens," *Sèvres: Revue de la Société des amis du Musée national de céramique*, no. 18 (2009): 65, quoting Şahin, "Kütahya'da çini-keramik sanati."

<sup>9</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Appendix F, "Spectrographic Analysis of Kütahya, Iznik, and Other Near Eastern Pottery," pp. 81-87. See also Colomban et al., note 32 below.

saucers, bottles, jugs, but also of tiles. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, there was an explosion in quantity of Kutahia wares, probably peaking with thousands of vessels, hundred of which bore Armenian inscriptions, and unknown thousands of wall tiles. For instance, in 1709 some 9,500 tiles were produced to decorate the Constantinople palace of Fatma, the daughter of Sultan Ahmed III.<sup>11</sup> Further, an order of 10,000 tiles was executed for the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem to decorate the Holy Sepulcher. These tiles and objects began to employ a distinctive bright yellow, which was already used in Iran and in Italy. They also portrayed fanciful figures from everyday middle and lower middle class life with gay and colorful costumes. Shortly after 1800, however, when there were still some 100 Armenian pottery establishments in Kutahia, the industry witnessed a sharp decline, as the result of inexpensive European imports, and, though there was a revival of Armenian ceramics at the end of the century, by 1914 there were only three or four Armenian potters remaining.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars confronted with the abundance of multicolored tiles, pitchers, plates, and bowls inscribed in Armenian from the period 1716 onward (Figs. 1A-B) concluded that Kutahia production was an eighteenth-century phenomenon (with imprecise origins in the seventeenth century), which took hold after the decline of Iznik. The work was characterized (and still is by some) as popular middleclass ware and specialty production for the Armenian and Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire.

The notion that there was a much earlier ceramic production at Kutahia and that it was somehow associated with Armenian potters began to settle in with a small blue and white ceramic pitcher (Figs. 2A-B), used most certainly for washing the officiating priest's hands after mass in the Armenian church, bearing a dated inscription in Armenian on the bottom and mentioning its patron Abraham: "This vessel [*bazhak amans*] is in commemoration of God's servant Abraham of Kütahya [*Kotayetsi*]. In this year 959 [A.D. 1510], March 11th."<sup>13</sup> The ewer formerly be-

<sup>11</sup> Kürkman, *Magic of Clay and Fire*, pp. 79-82, citing the Turkish text of a decree from Ahmet Refik, *Fatma Sultan* (Istanbul: L & M Yalincılık, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Kévorkian and Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman*, p. 151, quoting Arshak Alboyadjian [Alpoyachian], *Hushamatian Kutinahayeru* [Commemorative Volume of Kutahia Armenians] (Beirut, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 1, p. 78, transcription and transla-

longed to Frederick DuCane Godman and was published in a catalog as early as 1901.<sup>14</sup> But in the decades that followed, it was argued that the piece was Iznik ware made for Abraham. Among those who aggressively argued for a Kutahia provenance was Armenag Sarkisian, in an article in the *Journal asiatique* and later reprinted in a volume of collected essays.<sup>15</sup>

Even after the publication of a second piece from the same Godman collection, a blue and white water bottle (Figs. 3A-B), the long stem broken at the top, some would not admit a Kutahia origin despite the explicit assertion on the object that it was manufactured there. The first inscription is on the ring just above the round belly of the vessel, under glaze: "Bishop Ter Martiros sent word here to K'ot'ayës: 'May the Holy Mother of God intercede for you: send one water-bottle (*surahi*) here.' May Ter Martiros receive it in peace. In the year 978 [A.D. 1529] on the 18th of March this water-bottle was inscribed."

A second inscription is on the bottom: "Ter Martiros sent word from Angora: 'May this water-bottle [be] an object [of] (K'ot'ays) for this Monastery of the Holy Mother of God'."<sup>16</sup> Though Arthur Lane was the first to publish this inscription (1957), he refused to accept its Kutahia origin, as Carswell so gently but pointedly, put it: "Although the references to Kütahya in the inscriptions are hardly ambiguous, Lane was convinced that neither of the vessels was made in Kütahya. While granting that both were the work of Armenian craftsmen, he maintained that they were made in Iznik."<sup>17</sup>

---

tion of Charles Dowsett (slightly modified) originally sent to Arthur Lane in the 1950s and used by the latter in his article "The Ottoman Pottery of Isnik," *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 2 (1957): 247-81.

<sup>14</sup> *Catalogue of the Godman Collection of Oriental and Spanish Pottery and Glass* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1901), pp. vii, 52, item no. 7, illustrated on plate LV, no. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Armenag Sarkisian, "Les questions de Kötahya et de Damas dans la céramique de Turquie," *Journal Asiatique* (April-June 1936): 257-79, reprinted as "La question des faiences de Keutahia," *Pages d'art arménien* (Paris: UGAB Fonds Melkonian, 1940), pp. 103-13.

<sup>16</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 1, p. 80. Dowsett also comments on the various forms of Kutahia found in Armenian manuscripts and on objects and tiles.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. This simply raises the still unresolved question of whether Armenian potters worked at Iznik and if so, when and how many of them and in what capacity.

*Textual Evidence on Armenians  
in the Ceramic Industry of Kutahia*

Two fifteenth-century colophons from Armenian manuscripts make specific reference to Armenian ceramic craftsmen; the first of 1444-45 mentions the potter (*brut*) Murad and the second of 1489-90, Abraham Sarkavag, son of a potter (*chinidji*, from the Turkish *chini*, pottery or tiles, derived from China porcelain in great vogue from the fourteenth century).<sup>18</sup> With only twenty years separating this latter reference to the Abraham Vardapet of the Godman ewer of 1510, there is a tempting inclination to think that it is the same person. In that same fifteenth century at least three Muslim monuments in Kutahia were adorned with ceramics probably of local manufacture: the tombs of Yakub II (1428-29) and Ishak Fakih (1433), and the *mihrab* of the mosque of Hisar Bey (1487-89).<sup>19</sup>

Sixteenth-century references include an archival record for a pious foundation stating that Mevlana Sinan Halife established a kiln for firing bowls in Kutahia in 1537.<sup>20</sup> It seems that Kutahia also supplied tiles for the great Suleymaniye mosque built under the supervision of Rustem Pasha between 1550 and 1557 and that the same Rustem established a tile factory in Kutahia in 1561 for the decorating of his own Rustem Pasha mosque in Constantinople.<sup>21</sup> A *firman* of 1579 speaks in bold terms of the Kutahia

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 2, quoting from two inventories of the Church of Surb Sargis in Kutahia made by a certain Astvatsatur of Kafa in the 1480s and published by Mkrtich Aghavuni, "Keotahio hin dzeragrere" [The Ancient Manuscripts of Kutahia], *Byzantion*, nos. 19-20 (Dec. 31, 1897, Jan. 1, 1898). Neither of these colophons was published by Levon Khachikyan in his XVth century colophons, but he does include one by the same Astvatsatur who copied a Hymnal (*Gantsaran*) in 1486 in Kutahia. See Levon Khachikyan, *XV daru hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner* [Colophons of XVth Century Armenian Manuscripts], vol. 3: 1481-1500 (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1967), no. 642, pp. 467-68.

<sup>19</sup> Oktay Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar devrinde Kütahya çinileri* [Kutahia Tiles in the Ottoman Period] (Istanbul: Üçler Basımevi, 1949), pp. 46-51, with illustrations and color drawings of various tiles; cf. Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 51-52, with a reproduction of the page from the Ottoman Archives, *Tahrir Defterleri*, no. 438, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 6, quoting Tahsin Öz, *Turkish Ceramics* (Ankara: Turkish Press and Broadcasting Company, 1954), p. 29, referring to *Süleymanne İnşaat Defteri*, D. 44 in the Topkapı Sarayı archives, and Carswell, p. 8, for the Rustem Pasha mosque, quoting Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar*

tile-makers.<sup>22</sup> Finally, a defter of 1600 refers to various trades in the city, including tile-makers and lists seventeen types of pottery and their prices.<sup>23</sup>

A firman of 1608 refers to a demand from the capital to Kutahia cup-makers to supply borax to the tile-makers of Iznik working on an imperial commission.<sup>24</sup> There are several references to Kutahia and its potters in the massive account of the seventeenth-century traveler Evliya Chelebi. While watching a day of parades in Constantinople in 1633, he comments on the ceramic workers from Iznik and Kutahia and their wares.<sup>25</sup> During his visit of 1669-70, he says that of the thirty-four quarters in the city, three are Armenian and three Greek, as well as three Armenian and two Greek churches. Most interesting he speaks pointedly about one of the "infidel" quarters as that of the china-makers (*chinidji*).<sup>26</sup> A firman of 1640 further underlines the active industry in Kutahia (and also Iznik), speaking of dishes (*tabak*), bowls/basins (*kâse*) saucers (*süküre*), jars (*kavanos*), and cups of various sizes.<sup>27</sup>

As would be expected by the large quantity of dated eighteenth-century Kutahia ceramics, including the tiles of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, textual references underlie not just the flourishing of the industry in the city but also the dominant role

---

*devrinde Kütahya çinileri*, p. 45, note 3, but the reference should be to p. 79 in the book.

<sup>22</sup> Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, p. 52, with reproduction of the original and transcription in modern Turkish, Ottoman Archives, *Mühimme*, no. 41, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 3, quoting Öz, *Turkish Ceramics*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 7 note 3, provides the important parts of this text.

<sup>25</sup> The date 1638-39 (1048 A.H.) is given for the parade of *esnaf* in Istanbul by Michael Rogers in Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, p. 282, quoting Orhan Gökyay's 1996 edition and translation of Chelebi's travel account.

<sup>26</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, pp. 7-8; Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 66-78, provides long excerpts in Turkish followed by English translation, sometimes repeated from Chelebi's *Seyahatnamesi* [Travelogue], but where the reference to potters in one of the infidel quarters is lacking, nevertheless, the details on Kutahia wares are interesting.

<sup>27</sup> Rogers in Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, p. 282, quoting Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlılarda Narlı müessesesi ve 1640 tarihli Narlı defteri* [The Ottoman Narlı Institution and the Narlı (Book-Keeping) Records of 1640] (Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983).

of the Armenians among the craftsmen. Two French travelers of the first half of the eighteenth century reveal very detailed information about Kutahia ware. The merchant Paul Lucas provides an inventory of the Kutahia pottery he sent back to France in 1715: “une douzaine de tasses à café avec leurs soucoupes, un tasse, deux bouteilles pour mettre de l’eau de rose, deux salières et deux escritoirs, le tout de porcelain [sic] de Cutajé.”<sup>28</sup> The French consul in Smyrna, Charles de Peyssonnel, gives details on the trade in the Crimea in 1753-55 when he was sent on a mission to the Tartar Khan: “Le debit de la porcelain est bien modique en Crimée, et se borne, année commune, à huit ou dix panners de tasses à café, de vases pour le sorbet, et d’autres plus grands pour divers usages; mais il vient environ deux cent panners de fayence de Cutahié de toute espece, comme pots, vases de toutes grandeurs, tasses à sorbet et à café, etc. Tout cela se vend bien en detail, on y trouve au moin cent pour cent de profit.”<sup>29</sup>

Two court agreements drawn up in Kutahia in 1764 and 1766 between the Ottoman judges Sherif Abdullah (1764, Fig. 4) and Ahmed Effendi (1766) and the potters of the city, published recently by Garo Kürkman, establish the undeniable control of the Kutahia ceramic industry by the Armenians in the eighteenth century. Each of the documents, published in facsimile with a translation, includes the names and father’s names of each potter. In the earlier agreement there were thirty-four masters and sixty-nine journeymen, while in that of 1766, thirty-seven masters but only twenty journeymen, leading Kürkman to conclude there was a sharp decline in production. What is the most striking, really rather remarkable, is that all the names in both lists are Armenian.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Arthur Lane, *Later Islamic Pottery* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 63; cf. Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 16. The original source is Henri Omont, *Missions archéologiques française en Orient aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), vol. 1, pp. 358-59; cf. Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar devrinde Kütahya çinileri*, p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> Claude Charles de Peyssonnel, *Traité sur le commerce de la Mer Noire* (Paris: Chez Cuchet, 1787), vol. 1, pp. 109-10, quotation in part from Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 16; Aslanapa, *Osmanlılar devrinde Kütahya çinileri*, pp. 109-10, quoting the *Traité*, p. 109. A paperback edition of the first volume of the *Traité* was issued in 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 108-15. In both cases, the sources were the Kütahya Canon Court Records in Ankara, National Library, the first from vol. 3, ruling 229, that of 1766 from the Cup-Makers Guild



Early skepticism about ceramic workshops in Kutahia before the eighteenth century has virtually disappeared and the two Godman pieces (Figs. 2-3), now in the British Museum, are universally recognized as the earliest dated ceramic objects from anywhere in Anatolia or other parts of the Ottoman Empire. This is due both to the study of archival sources and to the intensive scholarship carried out by John Carswell nearly forty years ago in bringing it altogether while at the same time providing a solid artistic and scientific analysis of Kutahia ceramics. The two-volume study of the 10,000 Kutahia tiles (Fig. 5) manufactured in 1718-19 that cover the walls of most of the Cathedral of Saint James of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and other buildings of the monastery, as well as related objects fashioned by the Armenian potters. The material served as a vehicle to discuss every aspect of the history of ceramic production of Kutahia, and also incidentally of Iznik, to decipher and present with the help of Charles Dowsett all Armenian inscriptions,<sup>31</sup> to analyze and reconstruct the sequence of these tiles, to carry out spectrographic analysis of the composition of the tiles,<sup>32</sup> but also items like the Godman pieces as well as Iznik items, to identify the potters marks, to minutely draw the placement of each of the thousands of the tiles, and to profile the scores of types. All of this research was directed to rehabilitate Kutahia and its Armenian potters not just in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but to show clearly that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also great moments for wares produced in that city. These volumes not only surveyed the scholarly literature devoted to ceramics produced in the Ottoman Empire but also reviewed and

---

Agreement, page 57 of an unspecified volume of the Canon Court Records.

<sup>31</sup> Charles F.J. Dowsett (1924-1998) was the first Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian at Oxford University who had already been working on the inscriptions on Kutahia ware and other objects since the 1950s as noted above in the reference to Arthur Lane.

<sup>32</sup> More scientific examinations of Kutahia tiles have recently been conducted: Philippe Colomban, Raphaël de Laveaucoupet, Véronique Milande, "On-Site Raman Spectroscopic Analysis of Kütahya Fritwares," *Journal of Raman Spectroscopy* 36, no. 9 (2005): 857-63. Colomban also examined Iznik tiles by Raman spectroscopy: "L'exemple ici-bas montre la différenciation dans un même corpus de céramiques ottomanes entre les productions d'Iznik et de Kütahya, voire dans celles d'Iznik de différentes périodes." See "Nouveaux outils et concepts dans l'analyse Raman des verres," paper read at a conference in Nancy in November 2006 titled "Verre, matériau fonctionnel du future," p. 3 of the pdf. on the Internet.

digested historical sources in Armenian<sup>33</sup> and Turkish<sup>34</sup> that shed light directly on the potters and population of this western Anatolian city.<sup>35</sup>

### *Kutahia Tiles of the Armenian Cathedral of Saint James in Jerusalem*

Kutahia kilns are of course most famous for the tiles (and several liturgical objects) fashioned between 1716 and 1721. At least forty-five of these, which arrived in 1719, were specially commissioned by Abraham Vardapet from Armenians in Kutahia for the renovation and decoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but because of a dispute between the various religious authorities—Greek, Latin, Armenian—that enjoyed custody over the holy shrine, the work was never carried out. Subsequently, Eghishe Vardapet used these Kutahia tiles in the restoration and decoration of the Cathedral of Saint James (Surb Hakob) and its various chapels and adjoining buildings between 1727 and 1737.<sup>36</sup> The pictorial tiles were placed haphazardly (Fig. 5) throughout the cathedral and adjoining buildings. Three other tiles from the series are known, two acquired in the nineteenth century by the Musée national de Céramique at Sèvres, and

---

<sup>33</sup> The most important are: Mkrtich Aghavuni, "Keotahio hin dzeragrere" [The Ancient Manuscripts of Kutahia], *Byzantion*, nos. 19-20 (Dec. 31, 1897, Jan 1, 1898); Haroutiun Kurdian, "Kutinahay hakhchapakinere" [The Armenian Pottery of Kutahia Armenians], originally published in *Geghuni* (1947): 25-30, special number dedicated to *Bazmavep*. I. Akian, *Katolike hayere Kutinayi* [The Catholic Armenians of Kutahia] (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1960); Hamabartsum Zortian [Arnak], ed., *Kutinahay zhamanakagrutiun* [Chronicle of the Kutina Armenians] (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1960); Alboyadjian, *Hushamadian Kutinahayeru*. One can add to this list an earlier article by Zortian, "Hakhchapaki" [Ceramics], in Teodik, *Amenun taretsoytse* [Everyone's Almanac], vol. 17 (1923): 198-228.

<sup>34</sup> See primarily Ahmet Refik, *Istanbul hayatı (901-1000 A.H.)* [Life in Istanbul (901-1000 A.H.)] (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), for official documents, now supplemented by various articles of Mübahat Küçükoglu on imperial decrees and Ottoman registers as cited in Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya by Pottery and Potters*, pp. 285, 395.

<sup>35</sup> Carswell, who has continued his studies of ceramics of Kutahia and Iznik, brings new information and analysis to the subject. Among the most important of these are "C'est la gare!" in *Islamic Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, ed. J. W. Allan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 99-109, and *Iznik Pottery* (London: British Museum, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, pp. 12-13.

another in a private collection in France showing Saint Gregory flanked by Saint Basil of Caesarea and Saint John Chrysostom with King Trdat metamorphosed as a bore, and his sister Khosrovidukht (Fig. 6).<sup>37</sup> Carswell with Dowsett's help reorganized the tiles into three categories and in their proper sequence thanks to the running inscriptions at the top and the bottom of series A and B, respectively of eight Old Testament and twenty-seven New Testament scenes, while series C has twenty tiles of mixed symbolic and Old and New Testament subjects with long inscriptions at the bottom.<sup>38</sup>

### *Kutahia Ware*

One of the most popular forms originating from the kilns at Kutahia were egg-shaped ornaments hung on the chains from which oil lamps were suspended in churches and mosques (Fig. 7). A few are inscribed suggesting that Armenian pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, where the great majority is found, used some as votive offerings. They may have been more than just ornaments; some say they are barriers against mice which, attracted by the animal fat once used in the lamps, would slide off the slick surface of the egg as they made their way down the chain to the oil. Kutahia eggs are variously decorated, but the most common type displays seraphim, the famous six-winged guardian angels of the Old Testament often found on Armenian liturgical objects and paintings. Other popular shapes of these ceramics are the demitasse cups without handles, saucers, plates, rose-water flasks, lemon squeezers, even chalices, incense burners, and miscellaneous objects. Armenian inscriptions abound on Kutahia vessels, whether eggs, plates, water jugs, flasks, incense burners, or tile plaques.<sup>39</sup>

Most major museums have collections of Kutahia pottery of varying size and quality: the Louvre, Musée des arts décoratives, Musée national de Céramique at Sèvres, British Museum, Vic-

<sup>37</sup> The three tiles have been carefully studied in the context of the whole series by Soustiel, "Kütahya-Jérusalem," and Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*.

<sup>38</sup> Carefully arranged and illustrated in color, Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, ch. 2: "The Pictorial Tiles," and ch. 3, "The Inscriptions," pp. 12-67. Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 85-107, presents virtually all of them in fresh color photographs.

<sup>39</sup> Carswell presents all types and has section drawings of them.

toria and Albert Museum, Ashmolean in Oxford, Musée royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, Metropolitan Museum in New York, Cincinnati Art Museum, Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) in Watertown (much of it from the former Paul and Victoria Bedoukian and the Haroutune and Tina Hazarian collections), Benaki Museum in Athens, museums of the Mekhitarist Brotherhood in Venice and Vienna, Hebrew Museum in Jerusalem, as well as the various museums in Turkey, especially the Archaeological Museums of Istanbul and in Kutahya. In addition to the newly formed private collections in Istanbul, there are others now seemingly everywhere including the Pamboukdjian collection in Paris and the Kalfayan Collection in London and Thessaloniki. Most of the carefully formed older collections have either been sold at auction, given to public institutions, or otherwise dispersed. These include those of H. Kurdian (to Venice Mekhitarists), H. and T. Hazarian (ALMA and auction sales), P. and V. Bedoukian (ALMA), Dikran Kelekian (sold to a Paris dealer, then auctioned in 1970), Jacques Matossian of Cairo (sold), Godman (British Museum), M. Savadjian (sold in Paris in 1927), J.R.A. Brocklebank (the Ashmolean, Oxford).

### *Kutahia Pottery in the Twentieth Century*

The extraordinary beauty of the polychrome Kutahia vessels of the first half of the eighteenth century with their yellows, greens, and reds, the finesse of their blue and white tiles, the expressive provincial nature of their pictorial scenes, and the fine, elegant quality of certain bowls, cups, and saucers using a very thin white clay so much like Chinese porcelain that foreigners often referred to it by that name, eventually gave way to a thicker, more summary painting and execution at the end of the century. For most of nineteenth century, the pottery business seemed to go into hibernation. Carswell remarks: "There is no glazed pottery from Kutahia which can with certainty be attributed to this period."<sup>40</sup> An official tax register of Kutahia from 1844 reports about a hundred individuals liable to tax, just three are potters and three journeyman potters as well as three pipe bowl makers, all of whose names are Armenian; clearly the industry

---

<sup>40</sup> Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 39.

was in decline.<sup>41</sup> In 1795, there were a hundred potteries in the city; by the 1880s only two remained according to a report submitted by Mehmed Ziya in the 1890s.<sup>42</sup>

The renaissance that took place in the last decade of the nineteenth century was spearheaded by three workshops: the brothers Artin and Haji Garabed (Karapet) Minassian, Mehmed Emin Effendi (who sometimes teamed up with the Minassians), and David Ohannessian, who once worked as a secretary in Garabed Minassian's major establishment but opened his own pottery in 1904.<sup>43</sup> Their efforts brought new life to Kutahia's ceramic production, creating vessels with the older designs of the Iznik style rather than that of early eighteenth-century Kutahia ware. Tiles and pots were once again sold locally and internationally, and the potters and artists exhibited their works at trade fairs, in Bursa (Brusa) especially as well as outside the Ottoman Empire.

During the Armenian Genocide, the Armenians of Kutahia were spared thanks to the Ottoman governor, Ali Faik Bey, who refused to carry out orders of the central government; however, most Armenians left, and in 1922 the Kemalists drove out those who still remained.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, by 1919 the Armenian Kutahia pottery industry was already established in Jerusalem. Among the master potters of the turn of the century, it was only

---

<sup>41</sup> Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 117-18, quoting from Devrim Topal Durukan, *Kütahya kazası Börekçiler, Maruf, Hisaraltı, Paşam, Şehre Küstü, mahallelerinin temettuatına dayanılarak idarı, iktisadi ve sosyal yapı* [Administrative, Economic and Social Structure Based On the Incomes of the Börekçiler, Maruf, Hisaraltı, Paşam and Şehre Küstü Districts of the Kutahia Kaza] (Istanbul: Marmara University, 2001), p. 36. Though Kürkman speaks of one potter and three journeymen, the list he gives has three potters.

<sup>42</sup> Mehmed Ziya, *Bursadan Konyaya seyahat* [Travels from Bursa to Konya] (Istanbul, 1910), as quoted by Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 118-27, who gives the entire report prepared by Mehmed Ziya in English translation; cf. Kévorkian and Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman*, p. 151, apparently referring to Alboyadjian, *Hushamadian Kutinahayeru*, no page given, who considers the early one hundred potters and the later three, rather than two, to be Armenian establishments.

<sup>43</sup> Detailed biographies of each of these can be found in Kürkman, *A History of Kütahya Pottery and Potters*, pp. 183-200, with a number of photographs of the various establishments and their patrons. See also Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, pp. 39-41.

<sup>44</sup> Kévorkian and Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman*, p. 151, where the name is given as Fayik Ali Bey; Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, p. 39.

David Ohannessian who was able to start a new life after a time in Aleppo and the surrounding desert areas. He was called to Jerusalem by Sir Mark Sykes, who just before the start of the war was the assistant to Sir Ronald Storrs, the governor of the Holy City under British mandate. Storrs had established the Pro-Jerusalem Society, intended among other things to restore the important monuments of the city. Ohannessian was assigned the task of making tiles for the repair of the Dome of the Rock. He in turn brought from Kutahia some ten Armenian pottery craftsmen led by master potters Nishan Balian and Megerditch Karakashian to try to put into working order the newly discovered sixteenth century kilns used for the tiles which cover the outside Dome; the venture was a failure and the project abandoned.<sup>45</sup> But with the encouragement of Storrs, Ohannessian opened a pottery works, "Dome of the Rock Tiles," in the Old City, which was active until the Palestine-Israeli war of 1948 when the owner left for Beirut.

In 1922, Balian and Karakashian opened their own establishment "Palestine Pottery" on Nablus Road, though in time the name was changed to "Jerusalem Pottery." In 1960 after the death of their father, Stepan and Berge Karakashian moved to their own premises on the Via Dolorosa in the Old City; Hagop Karakashian now runs the shop.<sup>46</sup> The tiles and especially the dishes, bowls, and other objects began to take on designs appropriate to a new clientele. Marie Balian, the wife of Nishan's son Setrak and a native of France, is a master artist who painted large tiles and panels of tiles which exquisitely render designs from Arab, Armenian, and Jewish mosaics found in and around the city (Figs. 8A-B). After Setrak's death, the Balian works are run by his son Nishan. In the 1980s, Jerusalem

---

<sup>45</sup> The best narrative is in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue by Yael Olenik, *The Armenian Pottery of Jerusalem* (Tel Aviv: Haaretz Museum, 1986), pp. 6-19; other details in Carswell, *Kütahya Tiles and Pottery*, vol. 2, pp. 39-42 (Karakashian is referred to as Kashan). Carswell interviewed the sons of Balian and Karakashian in the 1960s while researching his book. See also the biography of Ohannessian in Kürkman as cited in note 43 above. Ironically, the restoration was finally carried out in 1966 with Kutahia tiles produced by Turkish masters in that city.

<sup>46</sup> Garo Sandrouni of Jerusalem reported in an e-mail of January 9, 2010, that the Balias and the Karakashians remained associates until 1962-63, but that they had left their association with Ohannessian in 1935.

natives who studied ceramic making in the Republic of Armenia opened three new workshops.<sup>47</sup>

Ceramics made by descendents of the Armenian potters of Kutahia are found everywhere in Jerusalem. They are a great favorite among tourists and local residents. How long this tradition will continue, one for which Arabs and Israelis have great respect, is not easy to say. Methods of production have been modernized with machinery imported from the West and a certain uniformity has been the result, but the painting and glazing is still quite remarkable. Though the famous high quality white clay that was gathered and processed very close to the town of Kutahia and the borax used for flux from Shabin-Karahisar was for a while imported into the Holy Land by Ohannessian at the beginning of the Jerusalem adventure, for many decades it has been replaced with a poor local reddish material.

The future study of early Kutahia wares should probably be centered around three domains: 1) furthering Raman spectroscopy to analyze the composition of older tiles and objects, especially from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to help distinguish items produced in Kutahia from those in Iznik and other localities; 2) tracing the origins of some intricate design elements on Kutahia vessels from these same centuries, research which has already started;<sup>48</sup> 3) studying the origins of the iconography used by Toros and other artists responsible for pictorial tiles decorating the Saint James Cathedral, thus far unsatisfactorily researched.

There still remains the larger question of terminology. Even though scholars and collectors recognize Kutahia ceramics as the product of Armenian craftsmen, they are still often referred to as Ottoman or Turkish and are classified in most museum collection under this label along with Iznik and other wares. The logic

---

<sup>47</sup> Sandrouni, in the message noted above, offered a variation, for which see Olenik, *The Armenian Pottery of Jerusalem*, p. 15 and note 6. Olenik gives their names as Hagop Antreassian and Harout Halebian in the Old City and Haig Lepejian in Ramallah. I am unfamiliar with their work and have not been able to verify this information or to determine if there have been even newer potteries.

<sup>48</sup> Yolande Crowe, "A Kütahya Bowl with Lid in the Walters Art Museum," *Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 64-65 (2006-07): 199-206; *idem*, "Kütahya Ceramics and International Armenian Trade Networks," *V & A Online Journal*, 3 (Spring 2011). The article may be found on the Internet at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-03/kutahya-ceramics-and-international-armenian-trade-networks>.

is that of course Ottoman citizens produced them within the Ottoman Empire. The question of national identity of art works is a very complicated one. After all, the Greek Velasquez's art is considered Spanish and Picasso's work is regarded as French. The problem is to some degree rhetorical, one that may never be solved, only discussed.<sup>49</sup>

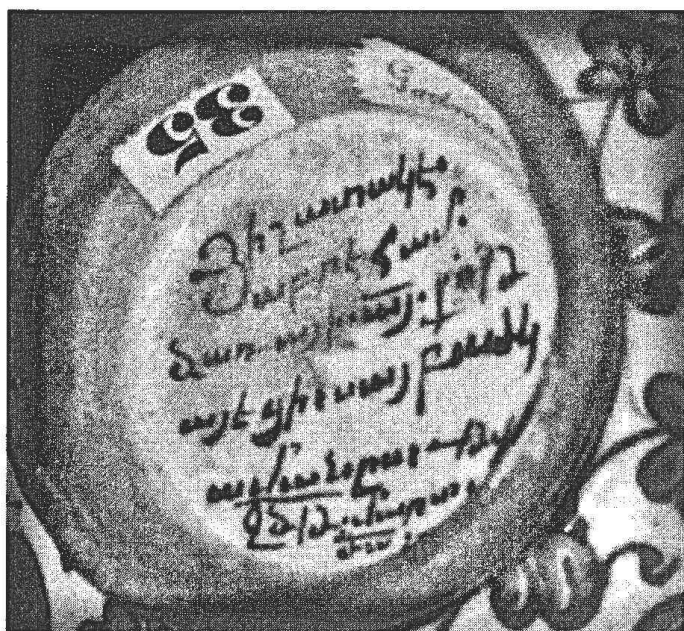
---

<sup>49</sup> I have on occasion tried to confront this dilemma. See Dickran Kouymjian, "Reflections on Armenian Painting on the Occasion of an Exhibit," *Five West Coast Artists of Armenian Ancestry* (Fresno: Fresno Arts Center, 1983), pp. 6-10.

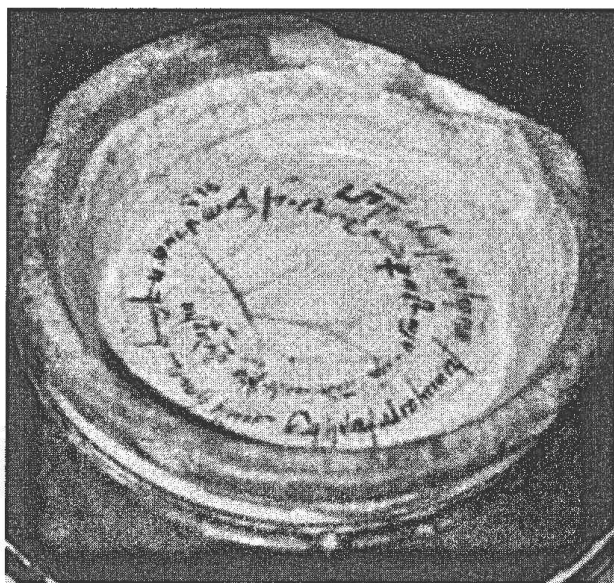
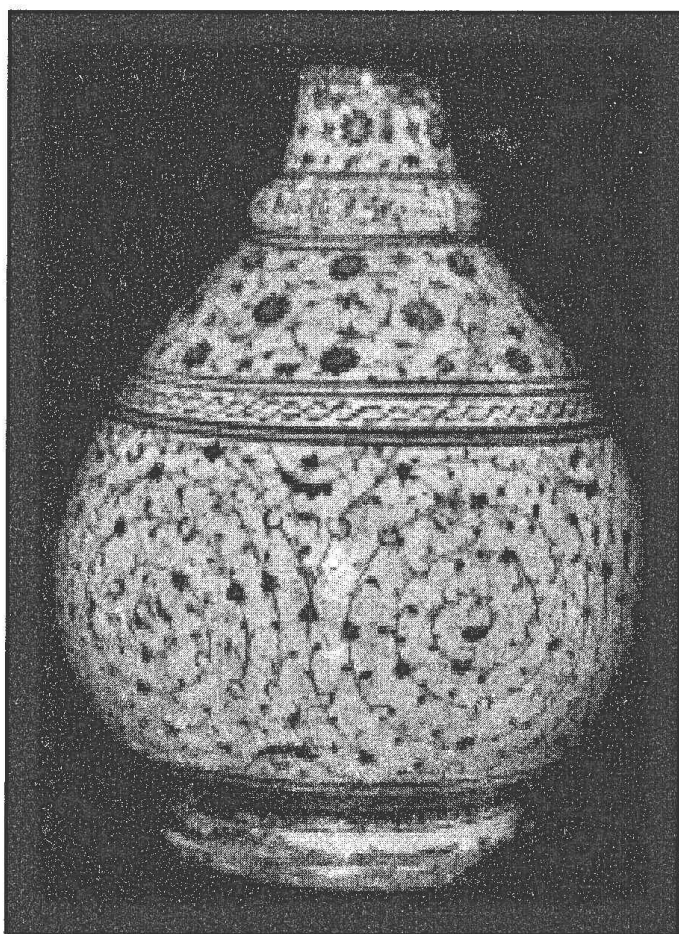




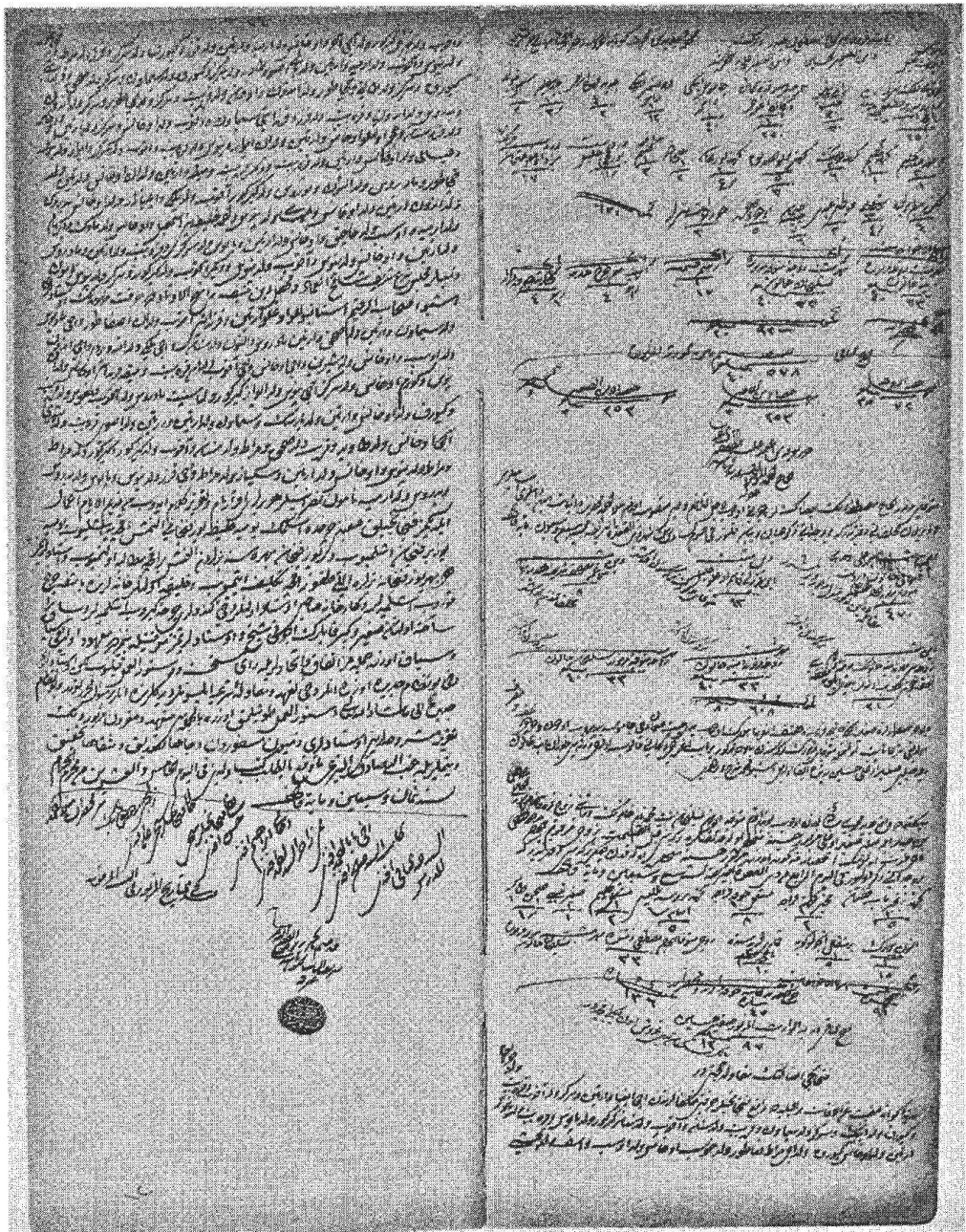
Kutahia: Polychrome Plate with Beheading of John the Baptist and Monogram of Abraham Vardapet on Underside, 1719



Kutahia: Blue and White Liturgical Pitcher with Inscription  
on Base, 1510

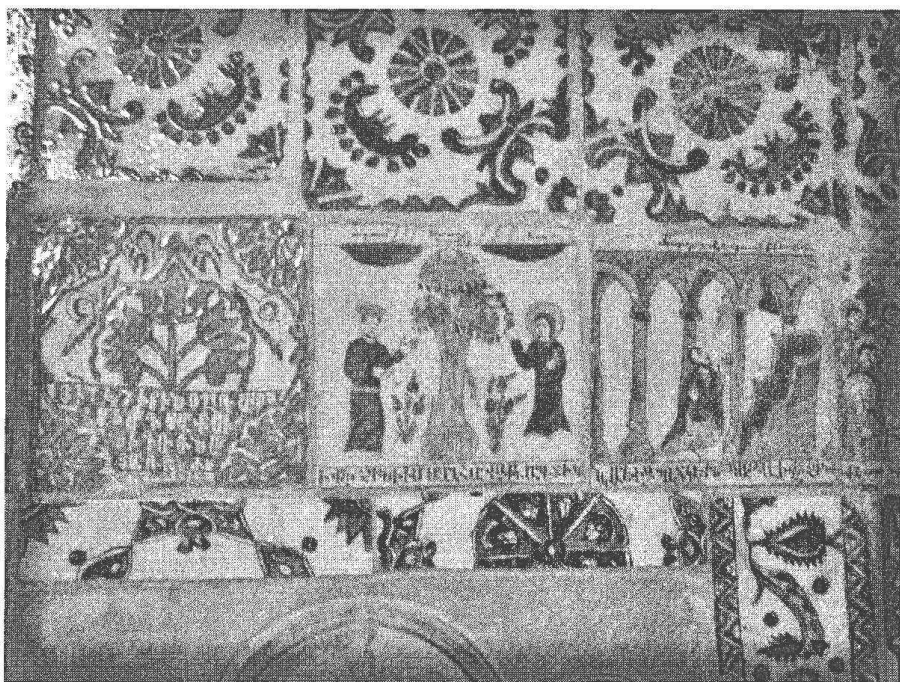


Kutahia: Blue and White Bottle with Inscription  
on Base, 1529



## Kutahia: Ottoman Judicial Accord Dated 1764 Listing Names of Kutahia Armenian Potters





Kutahia: Wall Tiles Depicting Adam and Eve and King David in Prayer, 1718-19, Jerusalem, Saint James Armenian Cathedral



Kutahia: Wall Tile with Saints Basil of Caesarea, Gregory the Illuminator, John Chrysostom. Lower Register, King Trdat with a Bore's Head, and His Sister Khosrovidukht, 1718-19



Kutahia: Ceramic Egg-Shaped Hanging Ornament with  
Seraphim, Eighteenth Century



Kutahia: Polychrome Plate Painted by Marie Balian  
with Signature, Jerusalem, 1976